

NATIONS WITHIN A NATION

NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE CELEBRATION NOVEMBER 2002

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESOURCES AND MATERIALS TO CELEBRATE NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

Before first contact was made with Europeans, Native Americans were a diverse group of people with sophisticated governments and social structures. These societies have contributed to the rich fabric of the United States. Today, there are over 500 federally recognized Indian Tribes in the United States. Native American Heritage Month provides an opportunity to honor, reflect and learn about the valuable contributions made and being made by those “First Americans.”

The path towards Native American Heritage Month began in 1914. It was then that Red Fox James, a Blackfeet Indian, rode horseback from state to state seeking approval and support for setting aside a day in honor of American Indians. He received formal endorsements from 24 state governments. Red Fox James presented these endorsements to the White House on December 14, 1915. However, there is no record of any official day of recognition being proclaimed by the federal government.

Earlier in 1915, the Congress of the American Indian Association formally approved a plan to call upon the United States to observe an “American Indian Day.” On September 28, 1915, the President of the Congress of the American Indian Association declared the second Saturday of each May as American Indian Day.

Since these early beginnings, the national government has designated weeks, months and even one year (1992) to honor and respect the contributions of Native Americans.

The materials provided by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts (AOUSC) are intended to stimulate discussion, provide background information and offer suggestions for celebrating Native American Heritage Month. Suggested activities can be found throughout the sourcebook and a Resource Guide is found in Chapter 10.